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ABSTRACT

An adult education program designed to help limited-English-proficient students through the transition from basic English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) instruction to more comprehensive adult basic education (ABE) is described. This transition is often difficult because of a mix of student needs, literacy backgrounds, and language proficiency levels and because the step from basic ESL grammar to higher-level language use and comprehension can be difficult. In addition, instructional materials for ESL and ABE have very different emphases. The program described here used a curriculum that promotes holistic use of English, emphasizes higher-order thinking skills, encourages students to move from a passive to an active learning role, emphasizes the reading/writing/speaking connection, uses a whole language approach, and provides cultural information as a basis for future work. A pilot class of 12 tested the curriculum. Student response to the curriculum was positive, and achievement gains were significant. It is concluded that the kind of curriculum designed for the program is effective in supporting the transition from ESL to ABE. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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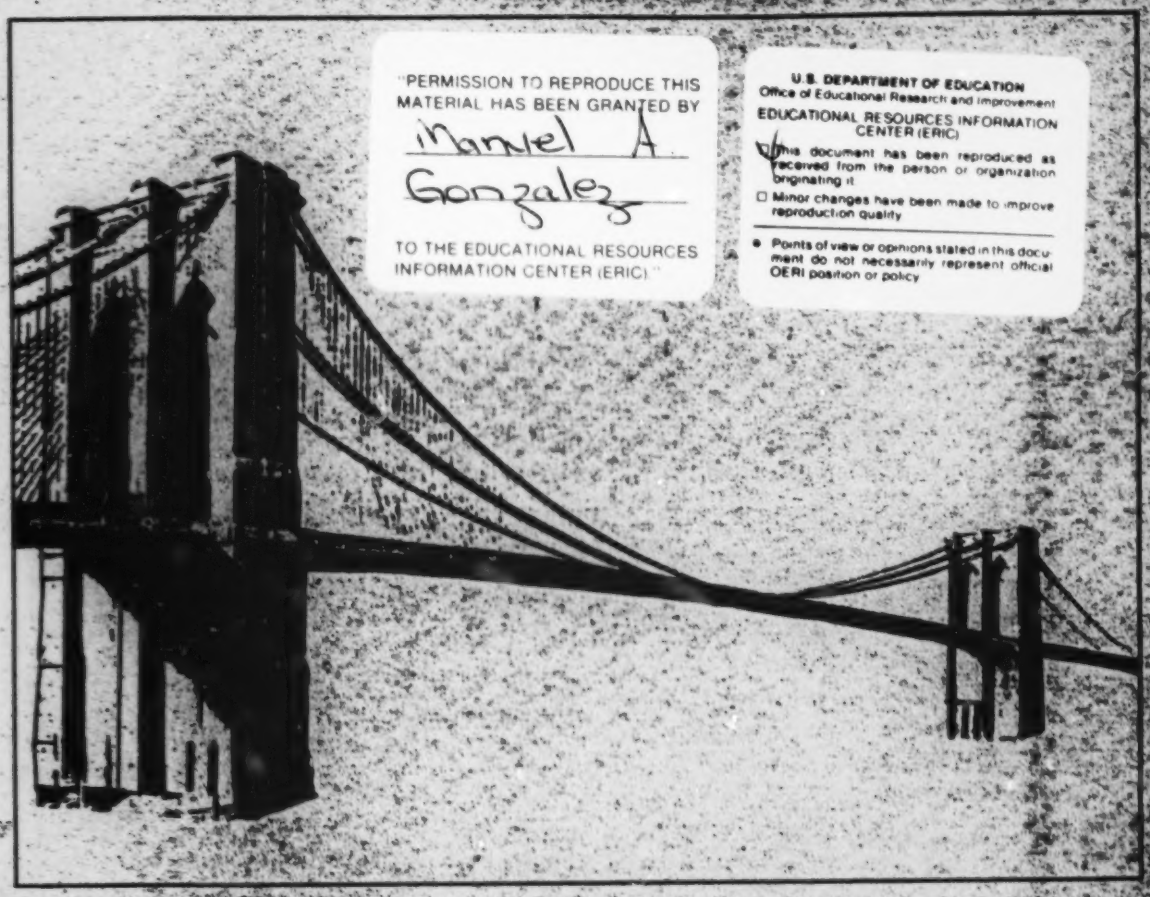
BRIDGING THE GAP

A Transitional Program From ESL to ABE

FINAL REPORT

ED 373 591



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BRIDGING THE GAP

A TRANSITIONAL PROGRAM

FROM ESL TO ABE

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FINAL REPORT BY

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NORTHAMPTON COMMUNITY COLLEGE
COMMUNITY EDUCATION DIVISION
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BRIDGING THE GAP

A TRANSITIONAL PROGRAM FROM ESL TO ABE

FINAL REPORT

JUDY RANCE-RONEY, DIRECTOR

MICHAEL BENWARE, COORDINATOR/INSTRUCTOR

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THIS MANUAL IS A RESULT OF A PROJECT SUPPORTED IN WHOLE OR IN PART BY THE U.S. OFFICE OF EDUCATION AND THE PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION. HOWEVER, THE OPINIONS EXPRESSED HEREIN DO NOT NECESSARILY REFLECT THE POSITION OR POLICY OF THE U.S. OFFICE OF EDUCATION OR THE PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, AND NO OFFICIAL ENDORSEMENT SHOULD BE INFERRED.

The stereotypical image that many Americans hold of ESL students is refuted by fact: it is impossible to generalize about these people who are as individual as the countries and cultures from which they originate. They are young and old, poor and affluent. They come seeking freedom, education, adventure, self-improvement or economic gain. They come to escape tyranny, to be reunited with lost family members, to expand their cultural horizons. The one common bond that they share brings them together in our classroom: their desire to learn English.

The pilot class to try out the curriculum was as diverse as the population itself. Students from China, Vietnam, Peru, Puerto Rico, Korea, Poland, and from other locales joined together in the quest for language. The youngest participant was 18 and the oldest was 65. Most students had some high school education and the class was predominantly female. (See PARTICIPANT STATISTICS)

Background

It is estimated that 12 - 15% of the population of the Lehigh Valley is non-native English-speaking. Of the 500 or more students in Northampton Community College's various literacy programs, almost 50% are non-native-speaking.

For many of these students, materials exist which will instruct them in basic speaking, in grammar and in

vocabulary. A very few will also assist them in their reading. But by and large, their exists a heavy grammar concentration in all the materials. This language of grammar deals with verb tenses, with use of articles, with the order of adjectives in a sentence, etc. As phonics is touted as the key to reading in many basic literacy texts (such as Laubach materials) , so grammar seems to be the basis for all ESL learning.

Literacy/low-level ABE texts contrast starkly in their content. These materials begin with a phonics base (inappropriate for ESL students because of differing pronunciation patterns) and move through to comprehension of paragraphs. Recognition of word parts, "--ship" and "--ly" endings, recognizing hard and soft "g" and "c", and a discussion of syllables are just many of the topics introduced for low-level ABE students.

There is a point in literacy programs when both types of students must merge into a higher-level ABE curriculum. This is a point at which learning seems to stop for the ESL students. The crutch of a grammar base no longer exists. The controlled vocabulary of the ESL reader is gone. ESL students are no longer asked to recognize the grammatical structure of a sentence, but are asked to read entire stories and summarize main points and nuances. This is surely a task for which they have not been prepared, either by their teachers nor their textbooks.

Goals of the ESL Learner

It is natural, and in most cases correct to assume, that an ESL learner attempts to decode written and oral language for the purpose of comprehending a message that the author is trying to convey. Yet, interestingly enough, this does not seem to be the primary motivating factor that we have found to be present in the ESL student. Until they develop fluency and confidence that is only realized through long-term residence in the U.S., their purpose for reading and writing is primarily to incorporate new linguistic data (more grammar) and to expand their vocabulary base. They seek to acquire syntactic and semantic information which will help them to be more effective decoders of English. Often these students will approach a reading passage or a writing assignment armed with a dictionary for translation, prepared to look up every unfamiliar word and also with a grammar book as a guide to the syntactic dissection of every sentence.

The higher order of comprehension, main ideas and inferential skills are sacrificed for linguistic knowledge. When requested by instructors to bypass this letter-by-letter and word-by-word approach and attempt to read more quickly to acquire a holistic concept of what the author is saying, these students often protest for fear of missing crucial linguistic information. They do not feel sufficiently secure in their English knowledge

to make the subjective judgements necessary to separate the essential from extraneous material.

As the material becomes longer (as in the ABE level) this reliance on the dictionary and grammar book as a guide to comprehension means that they cannot become truly involved in the story in an interactive sense; rather they are manipulated and controlled by the material.

In writing, the method they have relied on for the construction of sentences, grammatical piece by grammatical piece, no longer seems effective. The construction of pages of composition becomes a tedious exercise in grammar reproduction; all meaning is lost. The writing is stilted, overly controlled, and non-personal.

In reading and writing, they miss the identification and involvement with story and character. They miss the humor, the emotion, and the nuances of meaning so essential to the comprehension and enjoyment of language. The language task evolves into a tedious an psychologically-draining chore, the opposite effect we, as instructors, try to achieve.

It appears that in many cases, there is a difference in purpose between the ESL learner and native-speaking learners in our programs. Further, low-level ABE students appear to be somewhat prepared by their later literacy instruction in advanced ABE. But clearly,

entrance of an ESL student in an ABE class which emphasizes whole language and passage comprehension is a rather rude awakening.

The Project

As Project Coordinator and author of the curriculum, Michael Benware lead the path through various stages. Stage one, the research phase consisted of discussions with and interviews with a variety of ABE and ESL instructors. Michael concentrated on the differences in instructional goals. He found that not only does the material differ in the ABE and ESL classroom, but that the instructors themselves had diametrically-oppposed views of the language-learning process.

His next step in research was the analysis of various assessments recommended for use with each type of student. Again, the ESL students were tested for grammatical competence, literal listening skills, and word comprehension. Even when longer passages were used to test reading ability, comprehension tasks centered almost exclusively on the literal; not on author purpose, tone or mood.

ABE assessment seemed to be more real. Academic content appeared more often in the assessments as did functional reading tasks. Comprehension was less literal and more inferential. Grammar-focussed assessment centered less on the recognition of correct parts of

speech and more on punctuation regularity, and error recognition which distorts the meaning or the sentence.

Next, Michael analyzed the common textbooks and supplemental materials in the field. He compared teachers' manuals for each type of program and dissected the instructional philosophy behind the material. The text philosophy seemed to match the instructors' philosophies. The research found that, indeed, there did exist significant differences in the instructional programs for ABE students and ESL students.

The second step consisted of the designing of the curriculum based on these findings. The tenets behind the curriculum were that ESL students could best be prepared for ABE programs by:

1. an emphasis on a curriculum which promoted analysis of language holistically and at a passage level.
2. direct instruction in higher-order thinking skills.
3. a teaching style which was supportive, yet included some confrontational elements to promote student assertiveness and to move the ESL student from a passive student role to an active, questioning one.
4. a curriculum which emphasized the reading/writing/speaking connection.
5. a curriculum which used real language and literature in a whole language approach.
6. a curriculum which built up the students' knowledge of culture, American geography, and American history

to provide the necessary schema for future reading and writing.

7. an emphasis on the creation of real and concrete language which effectively conveys meaning.

The Pilot Class

The target number of participants in the pilot was 12. We had little problem filling the class and actually enrolled several students beyond that amount. The class could easily have exceeded 20 or 25. The demand for this type of curriculum was acute.

Students were recruited from various sources. Graduates of the ESL credit programming at Northampton Community College who had failed in the Developmental Reading program or on the Developmental Reading Assessment were included. Students were also recruited from JTPA-funded programs. These students retained concurrent enrollment in both the JTPA and Transitional programs because the case workers realized the benefit of this curriculum. Other students were chosen for participation from the pool of literacy applicants who seek to enroll in our community programs. Two students were also referred by a learning disabilities specialist who saw this program as a last chance effort to engage her students in learning.

Measures of Success

The final rating of the instructor and curriculum was high. In follow-up interviews, the members of the class noted that they had changed in their approach to learning and that they "felt stronger" in class. They noted that their vocabularies had increased and that they could now read significantly faster. The journal entries required in class increased from an average of two paragraphs to an average of three pages. (Putting quite a burden on the teacher!) They praised Michael as a "kind" but tough teacher. Several students thought that he asked more of them than any other teacher in their experience. A critical incident remembered by many members of the class was the successful completion of their first English language novel (Tortilla Flat). Another critical incident in student memory was the second day of class when Michael badgered them with clarifying questions (ex. What do you mean when you say you had a good time? Specifically...what gave you the good time? Who was there? Where was it? Be specific and concrete!)

Of the four students who continued into Developmental Reading courses after taking the Transitional class, ALL passed Fundamentals I. Although this is a small sample, failure rates of these students is traditionally very high. Few ESL students pass the course on the first try. In addition, two of the four

were exempted from Fundamentals II and were advised to jump into College-level English courses.

More measures of success are included in the project.

Summary and Recommendations

The premise upon which the curriculum was based, that traditionally-educated ESL students are unprepared for integration in ABE programs, was validated.

The approaches introduced in this curriculum were effective and changed the students' approach to language learning and to classroom learning in general.

The teaching style used by Michael Benware promoted language integration, student independence, and positive attitudes towards language learning.

Students perceived that the curriculum was very successful and there is some quantifiable data that supports this assumption.

It is recommended that further curricula be developed in the area of student classroom behavior; a curriculum which teaches assertiveness and active participation. It is also recommended that a textbook be developed to assist instructors who are instructing students in this transitional period. The curriculum as written explores different approaches and pulls materials from many sources. The on-the-line teacher does not always have the time to develop a program such as this

specifically geared to the immediate goals of that particular group of students.

Finally, I would like to thank the Pennsylvania Department of Education, Division of Adult Literacy and Basic Education, for their willingness to fund this important project, and for their acknowledgment that such a problem exists.

ADDENDUM

PARTICIPANT STATISTICS - TRANSITIONAL ESL/ABE

1. NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN CLASS = 23 students

2. SEX :	MALE = 4		17%
	FEMALE = 19		83%
3. AGE :			
	18 - 25 = 11		48%
	26 - 30 = 0		0%
	31 - 35 = 4		17%
	36 - 40 = 2		9%
	41 - 45 = 2		9%
	46 - 50 = 1		4%
	51 - = 3		13%
4. YEARS OF ENGLISH TRAINING :			
- IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	= 5		22%
- IN HIGH SCHOOL	= 14		61%
- AFTER HIGH SCHOOL	= 4		17%
5. NATIVE LANGUAGE :			
- SPANISH	= 8		35%
- CHINESE	= 5		22%
- KOREAN	= 3		13%
- FRENCH	= 2		9%
- JAPANESE	= 2		9%
- ARABIC	= 1		4%
- POLISH	= 1		4%
- VIETNAMESE	= 1		4%
6. EDUCATIONAL LEVEL IN NATIVE LANGUAGE :			
- 0 - 8	= 2		9%
- 9 - 12+	= 21		91%

7. ATTENDANCE DAYS IN TRANSITIONAL ESL CLASSES :

DAILY ATTENDANCE		% OF PARTICIPANTS
- 0 - 10%	= 5 people.....	22%
- 11 - 25%	= 3 people	13%
- 26 - 50%	= 3 people	13%
- 51 - 75%	= 6 people	26%
- 76 - 100%	= 6 people	26%

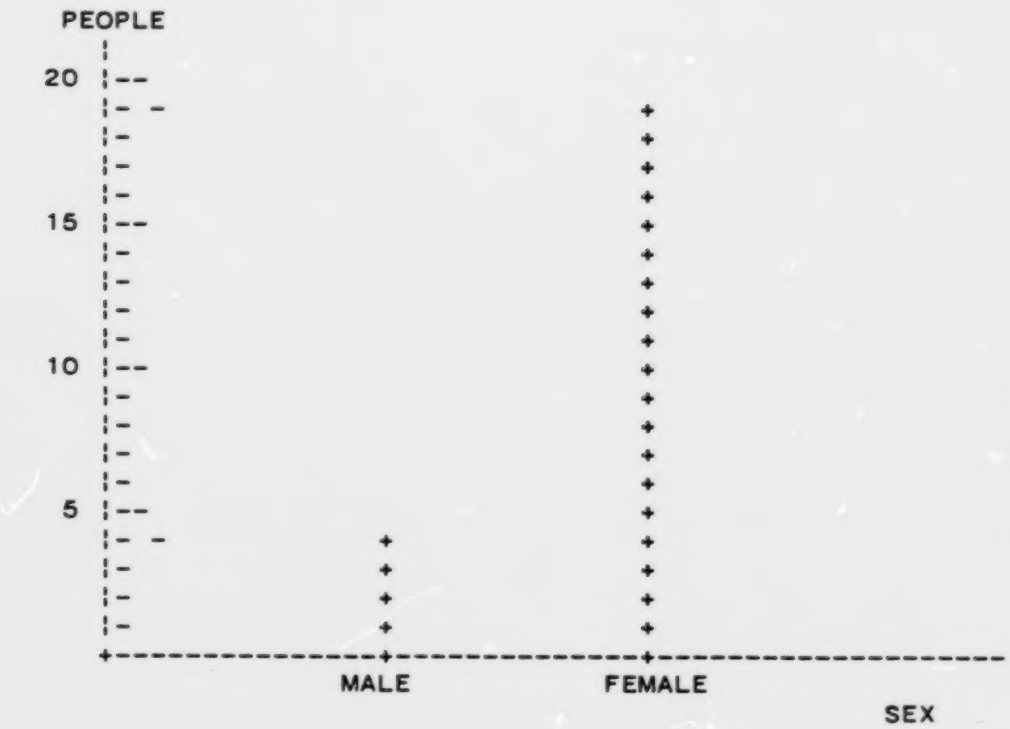
N.B. - NUMBER OF CLASSES = 55 classes (As of April 13, 1989)

- 100 % = 23 students

- 7 students = 30% dropped the course.

GRAPHS

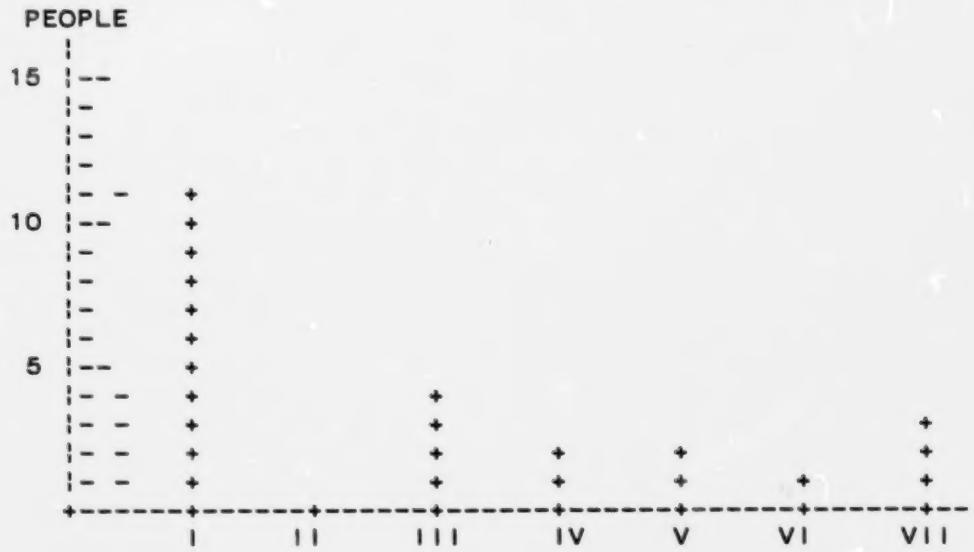
2. SEX :



- MALE = 4 people 17%
- FEMALE = 19 people 83%

- TOTAL = 23 people 100%

3. AGE :



AGE :

I. 18 - 25 = 11 people 48%

II. 26 - 30 = ...0%

III. 31 - 35 = 4 people..... 17%

IV. 36 - 40 = 2 people..... 9%

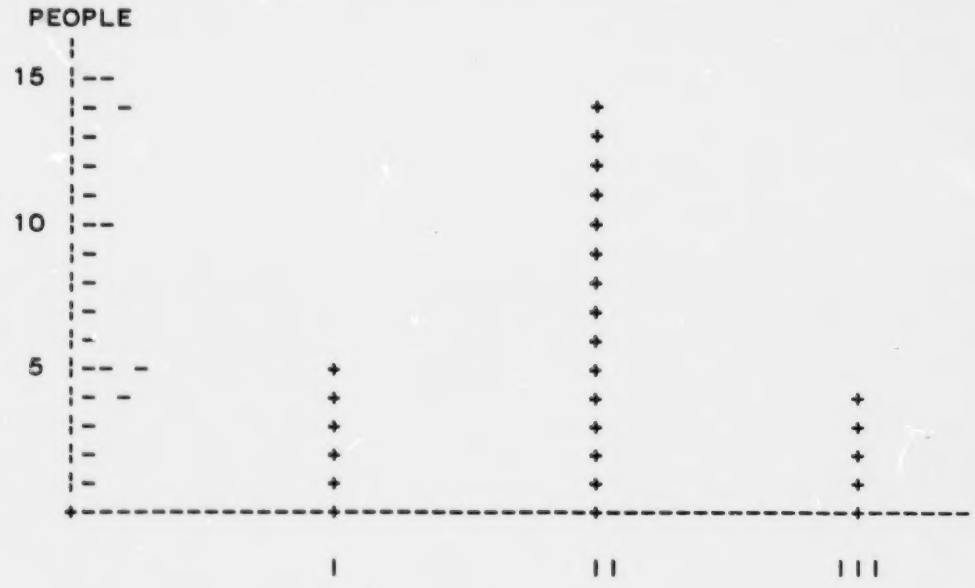
V. 41 - 45 = 2 people 9%

VI. 46 - 50 = 1 person 4%

VII. 51 - = 3 people 13%

TOTAL ..... = 23 people 100%

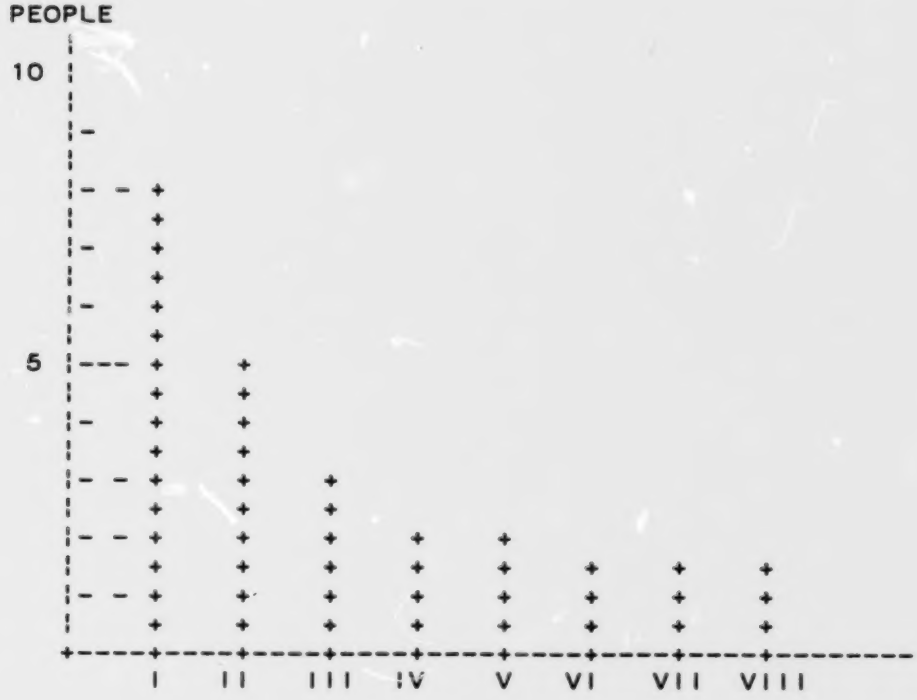
4. YEARS OF ENGLISH TRAINING :



YEARS OF ENGLISH TRAINING :

I. IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	= 5 people	22%
II. IN HIGH SCHOOL	= 14 people	61%
III. AFTER HIGH SCHOOL	= 4 people	17%
TOTAL	= 23 people ...	100%

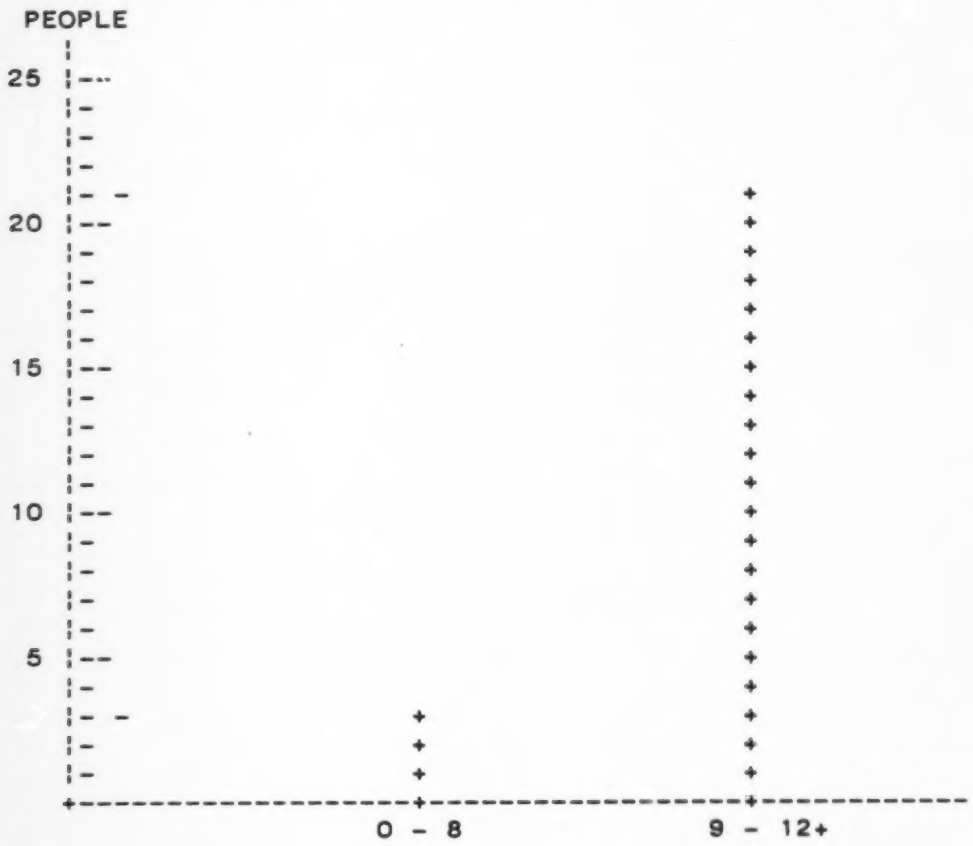
5. NATIVE LANGUAGE :



NATIVE LANGUAGE :

I. SPANISH	=	8 people	35%
II. CHINESE	=	5 people	22%
III. KOREAN	=	3 people	13%
IV. FRENCH	=	2 people	9%
V. JAPANESE	=	2 people	9%
VI. ARABIC	=	1 person	4%
VII. POLISH	=	1 person	4%
VIII. VIETNAMESE	=	1 person	4%
TOTAL.....	=	23 people	100%

6. EDUCATIONAL LEVEL IN NATIVE LANGUAGE :

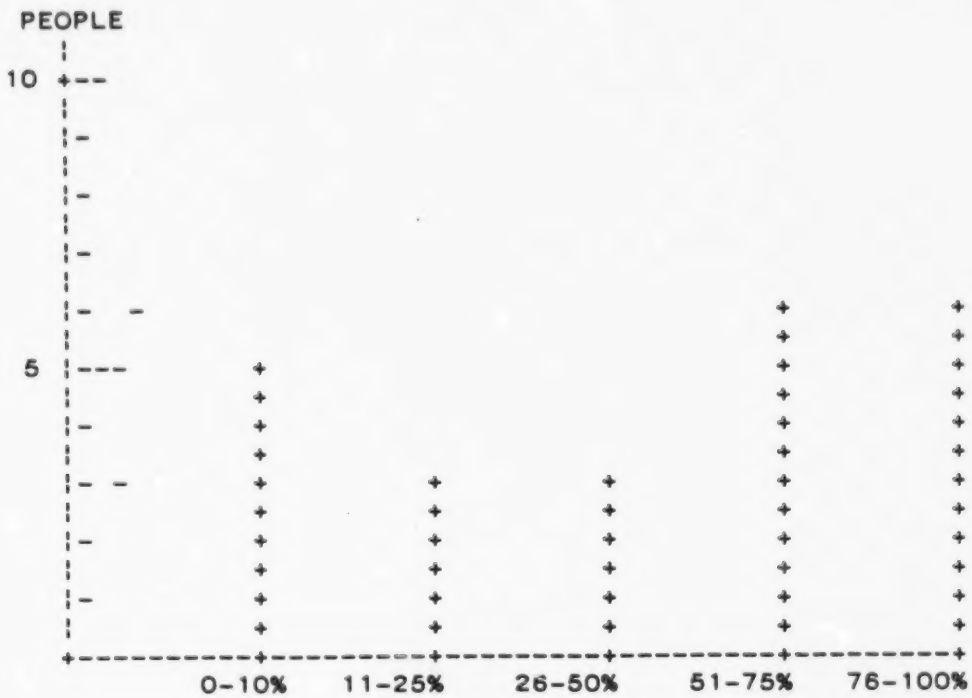


EDUCATIONAL LEVEL IN NATIVE LANGUAGE :

- 0 - 8 = 2 people 9%
- 9 - 12+ = 21 people 91%

TOTAL ... = 23 people 100%

7. ATTENDANCE DAYS IN TRANSITIONAL ESL CLASS :



ATTENDANCE DAYS IN TRANSITIONAL ESL CLASSES :

- 0 - 10% = 5 people 22%
- 11 - 25% = 3 people 13%
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- 51 - 75% = 6 people 26%
- 76 - 100% = 6 people 26%

TOTAL .... = 23 people 100%